

WARREN
HINCKLE

CIA protects drug traffickers

CIA Shedding Its Reluctance To Aid in Fight Against Drugs

— New York Times headline, March 25, 1990

"I FEAR I owe you an apology," C.L. Sulzberger of the New York Times wrote to poet Allen Ginsberg on April 11, 1978. "I have been reading a succession of pieces about CIA involvement in the dope trade in Southeast Asia and I remember when you first suggested I look into this I thought you were full of beans. Indeed you were right."

The nation's newspaper of record may have forgotten what its foreign affairs columnist learned. The Times reported only recently that the CIA had been dragged into George Bush's drug wars after years on the sidelines. The agency's chief spokesperson, James Greenleaf, said that for the CIA, "narcotics is a new priority."

That's not quite accurate. The CIA has been involved in the drug wars. It's just been mostly on the other side.

Drugs are an old priority of the agency, dating back to when the wartime Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's father figure, and its sister agency, the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), entered into dangerous alliances with the Mafia and held hands with Chiang Kai-shek's opium-smuggling secret police. In the post-war years the young CIA enlisted as Cold War "assets" the heroin-smuggling Corsican network and the Sicilian Mafia.

Soon the CIA was knee-deep, at the operations level, in heroin, opium, marijuana and LSD; cocaine would come later. In the

'50s, fearful that the Soviets were getting a leg up on mind-control drugs, the CIA, through its notorious MK-ULTRA and MK-DELTA projects, unloaded hundreds of millions of tabs of LSD on unaware Americans, many of them university kids. In the '60s during the Vietnam War, the CIA collaborated with Southeast Asia's heroin smuggling generals and the opium-growing tribesmen of the Golden Triangle; the stories of the CIA's Air America planes taking dope to market are legend.

After the Bay of Pigs, the CIA's paramilitary anti-Castro Cubans drifted from their Miami base into major narcotics smuggling and by the '70s had developed alliances with far-right, dope-financed terrorist organizations which the agency kept at arms length but occa-

sionally used to its advantage. In the '80s the CIA's contra resupply network and cooperating Central American military honchos took advantage of the cocaine boom with the agency's knowledge and occasionally under its protection.

Through all these years there was, as Richard Nixon once memorably put it, "a lot of hanky panky" between the CIA and its underworld assets and allies, many of whom were importing increasing amounts of heavy drugs into America. The CIA's method in these alliances was to hold its soiled cards close to its vest and, when a drug-dealing asset was caught by the cops, intercede with the law. Scores of major narcotics cases were dropped at CIA insistence during the 1970s.

The agency was so effective at protecting its contra-resupply narco-traffickers during the '80s that two assistant U.S. attorneys in Miami in charge of drug prosecutions, R. Jerome Stanford and Richard Gregorie, resigned in frustration because of agency stonewalling and deep-axing of evidence. Gregorie told a Senate subcommittee that the CIA's lack of cooperation in drug prosecutions amounted to a "constitutional crisis."

Far from dragging its heels in the past about drug wars as the Times reported, the CIA has plunged into the fray — but with disastrous results. When Richard Nixon first declared war against drugs in October of 1969 and made the CIA the chief drug intelligence agency, the result was that by 1971 more than 100 CIA-trained Cuban exiles, under cover of narcotics enforcement, were functioning as a White House goon squad; that experiment terminated in Watergate.

Under the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in 1972, and then the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which was formed in 1973, old CIA hand Lucien Conein headed a Special Operations Branch and created a deep-cover CIA/DEA narcotics operation in Miami, known as

Project BUNCIN/DEACON for its two code names. Conein recruited 27 CIA anti-Castro contract agents to supply drug traffic intelligence. All of them wound up, in DEA parlance, as Class I cocaine traffickers and were arrested 26 times by local Florida authorities during 1974-75.

Each cocaine case was dismissed on the grounds of "national security." BUNCIN/DEACON documents released under the Freedom of Information Act to researcher John Hill describe a "gentleman's agreement" between the CIA and Justice Department to dismiss CIA drug cases. When Justice dumped that agreement, Conein worked out a "cross-designate" arrangement with the DEA under which the DEA would claim any CIA asset busted for narcotics smuggling was on a deep-cover DEA assignment and was part of an "ongoing investigation." At the end of the day, only a 20-kilo cocaine bust came out of the three-year BUNCIN/DEACON project, and 27 U.S. prosecutions of Latin America drug cases and two major U.S. cases had to be dropped because of CIA involvement.

BUNCIN/DEACON, the CIA's major experiment in drug interdiction, increased the flow of drugs into the country. So has every other CIA attempt to help out the drug wars. When George Bush was CIA director in 1976, he received two reports, one from the DEA, the other from the General Accounting Office, evaluating the CIA's sad-sack role in the drug wars. Both concluded that drug enforcement and intelligence were two different worlds; it was folly to throw the CIA, whose business was covert operations based on maintaining unsavory alliances, into drug wars.

Bush nevertheless did just that when he became anti-drug czar in the Reagan administration. In 1983 he announced a major new effort in the war against drugs keyed to increased "CIA help in the crackdown." The results were, once again, a

calamity. DEA officials later testified before Congress that all the CIA did was sandbag them — not the least on Gen. Noriega, whom the DEA sent "atta boy" letters of congratulations on his anti-drug efforts while the CIA knew the Medellín cartel was using Panama for a parking lot. The Kerry subcommittee on narcotics was told that the CIA protected drug smuggling by contra suppliers on the contra southern front in Costa Rica, and the DEA's own investigation into the 1985 torture-murder of DEA agent Kiki Camarena in Mexico was slowed by the CIA's close relationship with Mexico's now-defunct Directorate of Federal Security, a corrupt Mexican version of the FBI, and the contra-arms supplying of one of the key suspects, drug trafficker Miguel Angel Felix-Gallardo.

Given the agency's narcotic past, President Bush's decision to send a "reluctant" CIA once more into the breach is anything but an exercise in cost-efficiency. The CIA's role is likely to be nothing more or less than making sure the new troops in Bush's expanded drug wars don't go off in right field and arrest the wrong people.

In a series of Thursday articles through the coming months, this column will examine George Bush's coats of many colors in the drug wars. Bob Callahan, John Hill and John Kelly provided research assistance.

Seabrook N-plant automatically shuts

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEABROOK, N.H. — The Seabrook nuclear power plant shut down automatically Wednesday, the first time it has done so since beginning to scale up to full-power operation.

Computers shut the plant down at 4:38 p.m. while it was operating at 30 percent power and producing electricity for about 182,000 customers, said Seabrook spokesman Rob Williams. Plant operators did not know what caused the shutdown.

Evening Classes

SAN FRANCISCO

LUCKEN CROWN